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ABSTRACT

Since contemporary media have an undisputed effect on the shaping of the social values of society, careful training of communication media specialists is needed, as well as unified international policies for such training. In a rapidly advancing technological society, the media communicator's task is twofold: first, to firmly grasp and conquer telecommunications technology, and, second, to redirect the role of the media from that of carriers of information to that of actual art forms themselves, capable of creating unique events, idiosyncratic only to the particular medium. The training of media communicators dictates that trainers estimate accurately and underline with precision the extent to which the main communication media have managed to replace old forms of information dissemination with new global ones. Media communicators must also be better prepared for the challenges of future international relations, recognizing the significant role the mass media can play in breaking cross-cultural barriers. Background in the theories of television composition, understanding of semiotics as they relate to the communication media, media symbolism as expressed by the sights and sounds of pictures, and satellite communication are but a few areas of immediate concern to future communicators. (HOD)

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APPROACHES TO HUMAN COMMUNICATION TRAINING: THE SOCIOLOGICAL FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

Media are extensions of man. A Painting, a photograph, a poem, a film, or TV program are all extionsions of the artists who created them. The artists function and interact through their media and their art forms, and through the media, they influence the making of society. In this paper, the following questions are raised:

1. In a rapidly advancing technological society, what is and what ought to be the role of the communicator in mass media?
2. How do the media influence the shaping of society? What do the findings say?
3. Since the impact of communication media has reached all corners of the glove, shouldn't nations pay specific attention to the systematic training of communication specialists who can at least use the media to teach pelple about the media?

It is suggested that since contemporary communication media have an undisputed affect on the shaping of the social values of our society, that carefull training of communication media specialists and unified international policies for such training should be established.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of the twin fields of computer science and telecommunications has resulted in an information revolution such as the world has never known. This information explosion has reached and touched all aspects of our culture, creating a new environment called the information society (1). In a very short period of time, computer and television technology have caused an enormous explosion in the field of communications which has reached alarming proportions, embracing all aspects of our lives. Recognizing this phenomenon, Arnopoulos states:

> The social changes brought about by science and technology are nowhere more extraordinary than in the way we formulate and communicate information. Within a generation, television and computers alone have revolutionized our culture to the extent that they are now creating what has been called an Information Society. It seems that in this new society, no area of human life will remain unaffected. Because the effects of information technology are both extensive and intensive, they concern society as a whole and must be dealt with by public as well as private institutions (2).

The information explosion has, first, caused an increase in the responsibilities of media communicators, charging them with new duties and responsibilities dictated by the Information Society. Second, the information revolution has caused a greater expansion of media effects, reaching larger segments of the Information Society. Third, the information explosion has prepared the grounds for communication specialists to use the media to inform society about the proper use and abuse of the media. This paper examines and briefly discusses these three key dimensions caused by the information revolution as they relate to the training of media communicators.

THE INFORMATION SOCIETY AND THE COMMUNICATOR

In a rapidly advancing technological society, the media communicator's task is twofold; first, to firmly grasp and conquer telecommunications technology, and, second, to redirect the role of the media from that of carriers of information to that of actual art forms themselves, capable of creating unique events, idiosyncratic only to the particular medium (3). A brief examination of these two tasks is in order.

The contemporary media communicator must be both a scientist and an artist, a knowledgable person in the hardware and software of the medium, a theorist and a practicioner combined, a conquerer of both the technical workings of the media and their artistic, communicative and aesthetic potentials. This dual persona of the contemporary media communicator, which was not required prior to the industrial revolution, poses new challenges to all of us working or teaching in the field of communication.

The first important challenge to be met is to fully understand the shifting paradigmes in the ecology of the electronic communication media. As Zettl states:

> All of us who are involved with and concerned about the management of information, need to watch continually over a proper ecological balance of communication - a balance between technical developments and communication need. Like with other ecological systems, we need to prevent the communication environment from getting polluted (4).

New technologies in TV production, for example, that start with smaller, more efficient TV cameras, more advanced editing and switching hardware, 3-D video, high definition television pictures, television computer graphics, and stereophonic television, to mention only a few, are constantly changing. With these changes, the paradigmes

in the field of television production are shifting. Equally, the development of Cable TV, Pay TV and Global Satellite Telecommunications are ecological changes which pose a greater challenge to the contemporary media communicator, forcing him/her to be better prepared and more familiar with these technologies.

Yet another serious challenge is the vast and important developments in other fields of the information society which directly influence the field of communication (for example, the understanding of computers and their creative capabilities vis-a-vis the communication media and all other segments of the information society). Future communicators cannot afford to remain unaware of computer workings in both aspects, hardware (the machinery that makes up the computer) and software (the programs of instruction that tell computers what to do) (5).

The second major task of the media communicators of the present and the future is to alter the old missconception that media are merely carriers of information, and to work towards the new understanding of their role in the information society. This new role, this new concept, dictates that the media of communication are by themselves art forms capable of producing and presenting unique media events of artistic and aesthetic merrit. This concept is a rather recent one and is based on the works of such art psychologists as Arnheim (6), art designers as Dondis (7), and media aestheticians as Zettl (8). The communicator is no longer a mere informer who constructs visual and auditory messages with an astonishingly rapid speed in vast quantities. The future media communicator should be an artist who has experimented, studied and understands the idiosyncratic nature of the particular medium. This media artist uses the media to construct visual and auditory

messages which are most appropriate for evoking the emotions and intellect of the media consumer (9). The media communicator of the future needs to be trained in the arts. It is required that he/she pay close attention and have a deep understanding of the new art forms emerging daily in the information society. Background in the theories of television composition (10), understanding of semiotics as they relate to the communication media (11), and media symbolism as expressed by the sights and sounds of pictures (12) are but a few areas of immediate concern to the communicators of tomorrow.

MEDIA AND SOCIETY

The information explosion of computerized television and satellite communication has had unilateral effects on the information society. These effects will be discussed here in terms of these dimensions:

1. Expansion: Media exposure to larger segments of the population
2. Intensiveness: Media penetration to specific interest groups
3. Mainstreaming: Media's imposition of cultural values

Media Expansion

The training of the media communicators of tomorrow dictates that we estimate accurately and underline with precision the extent to which the mass communication media have managed to replace old forms of information discemination with new global ones.

Easy access to world events through television (and direct satellite communication), coupled with the automation of the media, are among the chief reasons for the global village communication assimilation

which has invaded the information society (15). The world is no longer a mystery, a fantasy of faraway places, strange looking people performing unusual cultural events and ritualistic ceremonies. The world is known. Television has reached almost all corners of this globe and is perceived (although not understood) as a window of the world. This might be good and practical, but it also has drawbacks. The telecommunications media only provide segments, glimpses of a society's people, buildings, values, etc. They force the people of other societies (particularly of the Third World) to see the Western World in fragments. They see Western culture between reality and fantasy, rapidly changing and ending abruptly. Media expansion has yet another effect on the people of the information society. It has eliminated the "ground," the contextual bases necessary for the understanding of the figure, the meaning of the communicated event. As Nevitt (14) states:

> Nothing has any meaning alone, but only as a FIGURE in relation to some GROUND -- context, environment, or medium -- normally unperceived. This figure/ground relation is constantly changing as grounds become figures and vice versa. The meaning of meaning is in resonant ecological relations, not is rigid logical connections, nor in statements about abstract nature (invented by Greek philosophers), but in "the buzzing confusion" of actual "nature in the raw."

The prospective communicator must be aware and well informed of the effects both positive and negative resulting from the communication explosion in the information society.

Media Intensiveness

Long term and responsible research tells us that the communication media have profound and alarming effects on society when they penetrate through various interest groups (15). On the bases of the specific and more intensive media effects on Western societies, literature has developed various schools of thought and theories of mass media effects,

all of which intensify the areas in which media affects the society (16, 17, 18, 19). It seems as though the plethora of media information on one hand, and people's readiness to cluster into various peer groups on the other, has helped the communication media (particularly network television in North America) to identify, single out and address itself to such specifically intensified target audiences. The major consequence of such a process is the susceptibility to socialization in accordance with the dictates of the media forms. For example, one such easily intensified group is housewives who watch soap operas in the early afternoon. Another is blue collar workers who watch sports on television all day Saturday and Sunday, etc.

Another way by which the media influence the people of the information society is by using easily identifiable groups of people in power roles (20). These groups are utilized and manipulated in many distructive ways in order to perform specialized functions to reach the target audiences. Those of us who are assigned to train the future media communicators should not overlook such effects.

Mainstreaming

This term implies that communication media drastically affect those intensified groups of people who are called heavy viewers. According to Gerbner (21):

> The "mainstream" can be thought of as a relative commonality of outlooks that television tends to cultivate. By "mainstreaming" we mean the sharing of that commonality among heavy viewers in those demographic groups whose light viewers held divergent views.

In North America, heavy media viewers comprize a large segment of the society. These viewers leave themselves unprotected from the traumatic effects communication media can have upon them.

Social observers of the media, and speculators of how media effect society have contended that the mass media are capable of shaping social values. They speculate that media can stratify and dictate the process of socialization in the information society (22, 23).

Although the specific effects of mass media information on particular segments of society has been pointed out, general statements cannot be drawn from these sporadically conducted and reported research findings. The subject is complex and socialization requires long periods of time. However, the common concensus and understanding is that the communication media are drastically influencing, directly and indirectly, the shape of the society in which we live. The media communicator of the future should be keenly aware of this and conscious of the mainstreaming effects.

USE OF THE MEDIA TO INFORM PEOPLE ABOUT THE MEDIA

The global expansion of the information explosion is no longer a myth. It is a reality. Computer technology has reached all parts of the world. Telecommunications technology such as teleconferencing and direct satellite communication has invaded all countries including those of the Third World. The problems raised by cross-cultural barriers in media communication are still being examined by the United Nations and UNESCO, and to this day, a unified policy on international communication via the mass media is lacking (24). In this section, some suggestions will be provided in regard to the use, teaching and handling of the communication media to allow a better cross-cultural communication and understanding among nations.

The media communicators of the information society will be better prepared for the challenges of future international relations

if they recognize the significant role the mass media can play in breaking cross-cultural barriers. The first step toward this must be to utilize the media (radio and television in particular) to provide specific introductions to foreign programs. For example, American network television programs presented to the Greek society impose enormous problems culturally, aesthetically and in terms of their content. Unless specific prefaces, introductions or explanations are provided prior to such viewing, misconceptions and misunderstandings are guaranteed.

In addition to the use of introductory media units, the need for instructional programs which will aid in the development of visual literacy and will enhanse understanding among nations is paramount. The steps taken by UNESCO to develop Third World Visual Literacy using broadcasts are in the right direction and should continue. The establishment of international organizations and institutes such as the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA), International Communication Association (ICA), the United Nations Educational and Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and various other such institutions are working towards the bridging of the gap created by the lack of media literacy among nations (25).

The training of future media communicators who will be challenged with the problems imposed by the use of the media in cross-cultural communication should be extended to include the teaching and understanding of the structure of the various communication media. For example, Gattegno (26) argues that television programming of a vertical or horizontal nature is the most appropriate tool for the education of modern man, concluding that television will create a new culture, the visual culture, that will enhanse cross-cultural understanding.

Cross-cultural symbols, signs, visual codes and other such identifiers of various cultures must be explored and systematically employed by future media communicators. For example, television can be used as a carrier of these identifiers to inform the people of other cultures about the pictures or the particular objects, the symbols or signs, used on a radio, film or TV program. Just as traffic signals have been internationalized and now are understood by all nations, so the media symbols, signs and other visual codes should be carefully introduced, explained and understood. The mass media can do this much easier than other means of communication.

CONCLUSIONS

The information explosion we are experiencing today imposes vigorous challenges and responsibilities on future media communicators. Consequently, the sociological focus of media communication training should center on the following:

1. Since the media communicator is a member of a society in which he/she plays the dual role of the communicator and the spectator, the sender and the receiver, he should be prepared for both roles as dictated by the challenges of the information society.
2. The media communicator is an observer of the media as well as a student of their effects. Hense, the areas in which the media effect society should be explored and examined.
3. The media communicator should be aware of international relations and misunderstanding among nations and peoples of a global information society.

Future studies in the field should explore all these areas further.

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